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SUBJECT: UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: SAN DIEGO-TIJUANA EXPECT QUICK  
REDUCTIONS IN BORDER WAIT TIMES

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11. SUMMARY. At the request of the Mexican Secretariat of Economy (SE), the San Diego Chamber of Commerce held a meeting July 31 to update the San Diego/Tijuana business community on progress in increasing capacity at the California ports of entry (POEs). The meeting was well attended, including representatives from the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations (SRE), the Mexican Embassy in Washington, U.S. congressional aides, and representatives from the area's major business groups, but the event revealed that the region's expectations for border efficiency are unlikely to be met by the projects currently underway. END SUMMARY

SAN YSIDRO/EL CHAPARRAL

12. The San Diego/Tijuana area shares important economic and cultural ties, though neither city is as dependent on the other as some of the city pairs along the Texas border. As a result, local efforts to lobby capitals for better infrastructure has lagged in comparison to the efforts of their fronterizo counterparts further east. Still, among those who have an economic interest in ending the sometimes absurdly long border wait times at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa POEs, the issue can illicit passionate, and often unrealistic, proposals. This was evident at the July 31 meeting hosted by the San Diego Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is continuing to push its "Border 2010" goal to reduce border wait times at San Ysidro to ten to fifteen minutes by 2010, an idea it has advocated during its lobbying trips to Washington, DC and Mexico City (the Chamber and its supporters will again travel to Washington September 2008). Unfortunately, the Chamber does not have many concrete ideas on how to accomplish that, other than trying to ensure that California gets its "fair share" of the additional 5,000 border patrol agents requested in the President's FY 09 budget and suggesting "stacked" lanes (i.e. two inspection booths per lane), an idea already incorporated in the General Service Administration's (GSA) and INDAABIN's (Mexico's equivalent agency) existing plans to expand and modernize San Ysidro. Another Chamber idea to eliminate the border itself and have border inspection stations at different intervals along Interstate-5, has neither been studied by engineers nor put into any detailed plans.

13. Also, the Chamber is not taking into account that GSA's three-phase project will not be completed until 2014 (four years after the Chamber's goal date), and it is not even clear if those expansion plans, which will increase San Ysidro from twenty-four to thirty-two lanes with five "stacked" lanes, will be sufficient to cut wait times as drastically as hoped. Dr. Gustavo, from the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, which released in July a study on border wait times in four key POEs along the Mexico-U.S. border, pointed out that, if demand continues to increase at its current rate, the existing expansion plans are unlikely to be sufficient. Moreover, efforts to make the POE meet the needs of the community are hitting obstacles. The San Ysidro community has lobbied hard for a south-bound pedestrian bridge on the east side of the POE, which would significantly shorten the distance pedestrians would have to walk when crossing into Mexico. Sean Cezares, from the SRE, admitted that the GOM could not agree to this plan yet, as it would significantly alter Mexican agencies' operations in the POE, though he is searching for an alternative proposal that all

Mexican agencies could accept. This issue was also discussed at length at the July 8 Border Liaison Mechanism. GSA is concerned that failure to agree to the east-side pedestrian bridge could derail the entire project.

## OTAY II

¶4. Hopes for "Otay II", a proposed border crossing east of the existing Otay Mesa POE, are similarly a bit skewed. Sean Cezares, from SRE, claimed that the GOM is ready to begin construction in 2009 and that it is the USG's bureaucratic inefficiency which is delaying progress. Pedro Orso-Delgado, from CALTRANS, rightly pointed out that the Mexicans are also causing delays. Most notably, the GOM has not been able to obtain the land on their side of the border necessary for construction. (NOTE: while the GOM has put a five-year land usage restriction on the private owners of the land, the restriction expires in 2011 and, in any case, at least part of the land is being illegally occupied by squatters. It is unclear how the local government or the GOM will resolve this). Chamber members seemed previously unaware of the land acquisition issue on the Mexican side. Orso-Delgado said that current hopes to begin construction in 2012 is based on an aggressive schedule that assumes the GOM can resolve its land acquisition problem and, perhaps optimistically, that a Presidential Permit can be obtained by October 2008.

## CROSS-BORDER AIRPORT TERMINAL

¶5. The much-discussed "cross-border terminal" at the Tijuana airport, which could relieve congestion at San Diego's oversubscribed Lindbergh Field, has had a bit more progress. Otay-Tijuana Ventures, a group of American and U.S. investors, including Grupo Aeropuerto del Pacifico which runs twelve airports in Mexico and Equity Group Investors out of Chicago, recently bought sixty acres on the U.S. side across from the Tijuana airport. Mark Rowson presented this group's plan to build a "cross-border facility", which would allow passengers to park their car on the U.S. side, cross a pedestrian bridge, pass Mexican customs, then enter the Tijuana airport and pick up a flight. Conversely, passengers arriving in Tijuana would cross the bridge, pass through U.S. customs, then pick up their car or obtain other ground transportation on the U.S. side. The group plans to hire a consultant to pursue the presidential permit process, but his claims that the permit process could be "fast tracked" could be raising unrealistic hopes that the project will be completed shortly.

¶6. COMMENT: Organizations like the San Diego Area Chamber of Commerce have the right idea in arranging trips to Washington and Mexico City and are discussing hiring a lobbying firm. However, while they are understandably frustrated with federal bureaucracy, they are too quick to blame the USG for all the bureaucratic delays in moving the projects forward, and seem unaware that local community activists and complications on the Mexican side also cause problems. The GOM clearly sees using organizations such as the Chamber as a key strategy to pushing their border infrastructure agenda forward in Washington, sponsoring meetings such as this one and never failing to send an SRE representative to each and every border meeting in the region. So far, they have not had the results they hoped for. If the U.S. economy continues to slow, there might be some short-term relief in wait times at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, but the region will have to be patient for more drastic relief.

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